3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

Before the rite began all things were made ready. Ordinarily the sacred incense-hearth, so important a feature of the rite, was already built. It was customarily made by the keeper immediately after his lodge was erected on arrival at a new camp site and he had to have such a hearth in his lodge at all times. By way of exception, when the seasonal rite took place at once on the arrival of the tribe at a new camp and in the rush the keeper had not gotten around to making the hearth, he would begin the preparation of the offerings by so doing.

This sacred hearth was quite distinct from the keeper's ordinary lodge hearth. The latter was made without ceremony, in the center of his lodge, and without an encompassing circle of rocks. Such rock circles were made only when fires were kindled on the march, to prevent prairie fires, and on hearths built outside the lodge for boiling bones and so forth.

The sacred incense or smudge hearth was built with a special solemn rite of its own, a rite in no way connected with seasonal or other ones, in the following manner.

The keeper himself made the hearth, assisted by the co-keeper and Pipe child, or in some cases by an attendant or vow-maker. First the grass was cut on an oblong space, about the length of the Flat Pipe bed, between the ordinary family hearth in the center of the lodge and the Flat Pipe bed at the rear (north) side thereof. The keeper, co-keeper and Pipe child, if all three were to participate, chewed peppermint, spat on their hands, and rubbed their hands together as if washing them, but did not rub their arms or head.

The keeper, facing south (as also his wife) and holding an axe in his right hand, lowered the axe three times, spitting at each lowering, and then chopped in the ground the outline of the oblong space, beginning at the southeast corner and proceeding clockwise. Then with a knife he cut off all the grass in this space, smoothing it but not digging out a sunken one. The co-keeper, who had previously placed a choice piece of buffalo robe, about 3′ to 4′ square from a buffalo that had completely shed its winter coat, to the east of the oblong space, then spat three times on the cut grass and removed dirt and placed it on the robe, carried the blanket of grass and dirt out clockwise, turned to the east, walked a good

7: Flannery E-5 (1940, 1945) 1947
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796 The regalia were placed in front of their owners. Lay members sat around the sides.

● [354] 252 262 796 The fire was near the center of the dancing-place and beside it the essential pot containing cooked dog flesh. The meat was prepared by first rolling the carcass in very hot ashes to singe off the hair and until the flesh was almost black, after which the entrails were removed and the meat boiled. Incidentally, the Gros Ventres were very fond of the flesh of puppies and used it in large quantities to supplement other types of food for feasts at various gatherings, including the Grass dance. The food for the feast, of which all present at the Grass dance partook, was heaped to the east of the fire.

796 In this setting the ceremonial eating of dog flesh, which involved the preliminary dancing with crow-belts, and so on, was carried out. We shall refer hereafter to this whole performance as the dog ritual because this is the core of the Grass dance proper wherever found and, so far as the Gros Ventres are concerned, remained essentially unchanged from the earlier through the later period. We use the term "ritual" without implying that there was any religious significance attached to the performance in the minds of the Gros Ventres. Connected therewith were a few sex prescriptions the violation of which were believed to be punished by vague misfortune, but that it had any deeper meaning for the Gros Ventres there is no evidence. On the contrary, their indifference toward possible symbolism, for instance, is illustrated by their acceptance at face value of the statement as to origin and meaning by an old Sioux from Fort Peck, Black Prairie Chicken, who claimed that he personally had created the Grass Dance, saying that he had "gotten his instructions" from a rooster; that the headdress of upstanding red-dyed deer hair 796 represented the rooster's comb and that the so-called crow-belt 177 was in reality a rooster's tail. My older informants knew this old man when he visited the Reservation many years ago, and they assured me that although the validity of his story was not questioned, it had had no effect. They maintained that when the dance was transferred to them, the Assiniboine had not mentioned